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'Please think about signing the Newton North petition'

By Newton TAB

Tue Sep 12, 2006, 08:00 PM EDT

Newton -

A group of Newton citizens are collecting signatures to put a referendum question on the ballot about the new Newton North High School. This referendum question will enable voters to express their opinion about a design for the school that will cost upwards of \$160 million - four times the original cost that voters approved in 2000. In recent months, citizens have expressed the following concerns about this project and the direction of the city:

1. The mayor plans to finance this new building in part from "new growth" - in other words from the operating budget. As we all know, for the last four years, Newton schools and municipal services have experienced significant cuts that have resulted in a reduction in teachers and an increase in class size, as well as left our schools and other municipal buildings in disrepair. The operating budget cannot absorb the additional cost of this building. Inevitably, this capital project will lead to an override. To begin such an expensive project in the hopes that an override will pass in the future is fiscally irresponsible. We need a funding plan that we can count on as we head into the project.
2. A state audit has rated five (5) other schools in the city as "poor," yet there is presently no plan in place to address the extensive needs of these buildings.
3. There is no plan in place to renovate the firehouses in Newton, all of which are in dire need of updating and repair.

This referendum does NOT end the Newton North building project. It merely allows the voters to weigh in on an extremely expensive design that will eat up over 80 percent of all capital expenditures in the city for the next five years. Citizens will be collecting signatures at various supermarkets and other public places around the city in the next two weeks. Please think about signing a petition that will give all Newton voters a chance to weigh in on this very expensive design.

Richard Frantz

Trowbridge Avenue

League opposes Newturf plan

The League of Women Voters of Newton remains concerned about many of the issues we raised when the proposal to install artificial turf at Newton South High School was heard by the Community Preservation Committee in November 2005.

We have carefully listened to discussions unfolding in the community and in the Community Preservation Committee's deliberations. Still, we question the wisdom and appropriateness of using CPA money to fund rebuilding of these fields.

We have reservations about the proposed large commitment of CPA funds for this project. The NSHS fields are important to community athletics and need maintenance. A capital project to restructure the fields may be wise for the city to undertake as it plans ahead for several years of Newton North High School construction that will take those fields out of play. However, although a tenuous legal argument may be made to justify this as a CPA project on the basis of 'expanding recreational opportunity,' we do not believe this project meets the intent of the CPA law.

We also question the priority status implied by dedicating such a large share of the fund to this project. The CPC's obligation under the statute is to recommend funds according to a community-wide needs assessment. Can we honestly say that this project represents a need commensurate with our insufficient affordable housing, acquisition/protection of open space, and protection of deteriorating historic properties?

Further, attending to water issues is of paramount importance. South Meadow Brook, which runs under the fields, regularly floods downstream areas. Flooding is an immense potential liability for the city and could ultimately cost more than this proposal. Therefore, flood control should be coordinated with the Conservation Commission and with other projects in this watershed area.

We also fear that a strong advocacy campaign may lead to hasty approval of this project. Using this material in this location, requires vetting thoroughly and realistically of both first and long term maintenance and replacement costs.

We urge the Aldermen to proceed with the utmost scrutiny as they assess this large request for CPA funds.

Susan Rosenbaum, president

League of Women Voters

'Mr. Epstein, your empty rhetoric is tiring'

How disappointing that Mr. Epstein (Letters to the editor, Aug. 30 TAB), who provoked what could have been an interesting discussion about whether Jews should vote for the GOP, has sabotaged the discussion by the use of GOP/ Rove inspired propaganda techniques. Previously, Mr. Miller had written a very thoughtful response to him, carefully listing reasons why the Bush administration's policies are out of keeping with Jewish traditions and values. Instead of utilizing the list for a discussion (which could further debate and understanding), Mr. Epstein accused the writer of being a "Bush hater."

By using the phrase "Bush hater," Mr. Epstein attempts to frustrate the very dialogue he appeared to initiate in the pages of the TAB. Instead we get the propagandistic notion that those of us (Now a growing majority of Americans) who oppose the Bush administration policies are angry and irrational. Instead of a discussion of the policies of the administration, we get smears and innuendo.

In addition, in the Aug. 26 TAB, Mr. Epstein asks that the Newton Public Schools "dispense with some ... of its 'multicultural' agenda and focus more on good old fashioned American patriotism." Mr. Epstein, where is the meat? Your empty rhetoric is tiring. How would you define "patriotism" and what makes you think that "multiculturalism" is not patriotic? How does teaching "multiculturalism" "weaken and undermine ... the continuation and strength of our nation"? Are you suggesting Newton should focus on White peoples' history? Do you think a patriotic education involves the notion that one should support what the US government does, right or wrong, even if it is carrying out a murderous and unjust war. Do you suggest that those of us who criticize the Bush administration should be arrested for treason or move somewhere else? Well, wrong! We fight to reclaim the idea of America and the ideal of a wonderful democracy, one which has been and could continue to be an example to the world and the hope of millions. Right now, the administration in Washington is remaking the dream into a nightmare.

William Dain

Harvard Circle

'Know your heroes and villains'

Sept. 5, 2006 is the night that will live in infamy. After five hours of deliberations Newton Board of Aldermen approved the worst possible site plan for Newton North High School and the funds for construction manager. This means that the project will proceed as planned by the mayor and designed by Gund Partnership. But it does not mean that the school will finally be built because the city cannot spend \$165 million (at least) to build it without leaving other Newton schools in disrepair and sinking the city in debt for the next 20 years. Why did the aldermen vote for it? Because Mayor Cohen and his administration pressured them? Definitely. Because School Committee attached itself to the mayor? Certainly. Because the aldermen play political games instead of solving issues? Of course. But still there were seven of them who voted against the site plan: George Mansfield, Ken

Parker, Amy Sangiolo, Jay Harney, Marcia Johnson, Paul Coletti, and Susan Albright (Stephen Linsky was expected to join them but got sick). They were not rejecting the new school - they were trying to save \$60 million to fix other schools and public buildings, maintain the infrastructure, re-hire the fired teachers, librarians and firefighters. Remember these people - they are the living evidence of the fact that our legislative organ is not completely subservient to our executive organ. And know the names of the other 16 aldermen: Sydra Schnipper, Lisle Baker, Verne Vance, Victoria Danberg, Anthony Salvucci, Richard Lipoff, Mitchell Fishman, Ted Hess-Mahan, Leslie Berg, Brian Yates, Scott Lennon, Christine Samuelson, Cheryl Lappin, Leonard Gentile, Benjamin Weisbach, Carlton Merrill.

Anatol Zukerman

West Newton

Debate what will go in inside the new high school

The ongoing debate over the fiscal and architectural proposals entailed in replacing a not so old Newton North High School with a new building certainly has generated much civic attention. I, for one, would like to see a similar level of civic attention paid to what goes on inside any school building to be built or remodeled. How about our civic leaders debating whether our kids should be taught more about the values and merits of western civilization and "love of country" with less enmeshing of our kids by school administrators in what is becoming a pervasive religion of "multiculturalism" and "diversity." Such a debate would be useful - at least as useful as all the debate about the site planning of a new building.

James E. Epstein

Manchester Road

'Another nail in the coffin' for Newton North

In reference to the funding plan for the new high school that the mayor says he can pay for without an override: I recently read in one of the Boston papers that houses in Newton are selling below their assessed value. The new owners will surely ask for a tax abatement and reassessment of their property, which means less income from taxes to the city. The Republican candidate for governor says "No new taxes." Perhaps the Democratic candidates may be thinking the same, which means less revenue to the city.

Unless the mayor is a magician and can conjure money for the school or he is using Enron type of accounting to justify the available money for the school, I see it as another nail in the coffin for the school.

Perhaps he feels he can fool some of the people some of the time, but he cannot fool all of the people all of the time.

Oscar Baron

Concord Street

'We cannot trust our security to amate

Democrats'

My first reaction after reading William Dain's Aug. 30 letter to the editor was to confess. I'm one of those people Mr. Dain describes as not being sane for supporting George Bush. I support President Bush, his war on terror and our war in Iraq. After reading Mr. Dain's arguments for not supporting President Bush I am further convinced that we cannot trust our security to amateurs and/or Democrats. Although I don't find President Bush particularly quotable, I agree with his statement: "if we think things are bad now wait till we cut and run."

Robert L. Cerra

Auburn Street

Seriously, end i

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The July 19 TAB printed my letter "End City Hall arrogance" in which I quoted the Ward 3 alderman saying "I never knew there were so many experts in the city of Newton!". The August 30 TAB quoted this same man addressing fellow aldermen: "What makes you guys think you know any better than these in the business?" and sarcastically referring to these aldermen as "geniuses".

I can only imagine what kind of childhood conditioning formed this man's mentality, and what kind of statements were constantly crammed into his head those many decades ago by parents and teachers. "Don't talk back to your elders." "Don't question authority!" "Shuddup, Tony. What makes you think you know anything. Stupido!"

Somewhere there's a psychiatrist's couch with Mr. Salvucci's name on it, waiting for a competent professional to delve the mysteries of Humpty Dumpty's mind, before this egg falls off the wall and cracks into little pieces that horses and men cannot put back together. In the meantime, there's a wooden chair in the Aldermanic Chamber from which his name desperately needs to be removed.

For the love of pizza, someone, anyone, from Ward 3, get 50 nomination signatures next spring, and run against this aldermaniac. Newton needs to be freed from this autocratic mentality, and become a place where people are allowed and encouraged to think for themselves, especially when they are making decisions that are going to affect the whole city and cost a quarter of a billion dollars.

Adam Maleson

Winona Street

'Put this boondoggle of a project on the ballot'

We do need a new Newton North but we don't need to build a Crystal Palace or substitute sizzle for substance. We don't need two floors of community space while relegating our students to no man's land in a corner of the third and fourth floors. Does an evacuation plan even exist for the kids in case of an emergency? How prepared are the taxpayers of this city to pay for a new high school while the rest of the city's buildings are left to crumble? David Cohen thinks new growth will foot the bill but has he looked around at the 750-plus homes for sale and all the empty retail space in town? Talk about being delusional! When the bill comes due where will David Cohen be? Retired from public life and living high on the hog? The time has come, David, to put this boondoggle of a project on the ballot and let the voters decide. I for one agree with Brenda Loew and Anatol Zukerman and more than a few of my neighbors that the design resembles half a Nazi swastika and should have been discarded immediately. The mayor, Board of Aldermen and School Committee do not have the credentials to evaluate this project with any credibility. Nor does Jeremy Solomon, the Mayor's 30-something puppet. It is a shame that fresh blood cannot be elected in this city without the help of the mayor, Democratic City Committee and PTO's. Eventually the chickens will come home to roost and we the taxpayers and voters who are this city's "stockholders" will pay a very dear price for permitting a minority of politically correct radicals to control the city's business and run us into debt. I support the effort to put this question on the ballot and would pray for a large turnout at the polls.

Mary Clossey

Lexington Street

Terrorism threat vs. civil liberties

Watching TV, I saw with renewed horror the devastation, loss, and suffering caused by Islamic enemies of America. While the current administration can take credit for preventing another such attack, we live under the continual threat can it can and might happen again. As horrible as another such event would be, at least we are safe in knowing that Liberal alertness has assured the people of our community that the government will not be able to discover what book Mrs. Dingleberry has taken out of the Newton library.

Bob Spain

Waban

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